

## The Arrival Fallacy by pineapplefan

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**Summary:**

He really needs to talk to Mike.

He thinks it might help.

[Set following the events of Season 1.]

## **The Arrival Fallacy**

Dustin groans as the numbers on his alarm clock flip from 6:59 to 7:00 and the radio starts blaring "Cum on Feel the Noize."

He reaches to shut it off and pulls the comforter back over his head. "I feel it," he grumbles at the pesky device. "Trust me."

He's been awake for almost three hours now, plagued by another nightmare, and had given up on sleep the moment his eyes snapped open, heart beating rapidly in his chest.

He really needs to talk to Mike.

He thinks it might help.

xxx

An hour later and Dustin finds himself sitting numbly in Mr. Clarke's classroom, eyes – yet again – glued to a clock. He's counting down the minutes until he can escape from this place.

He usually loves Mr. Clarke's class; he's the best teacher in the school and usually, Dustin eats up his every word. But today isn't a usual day.

Not at all.

It's their first day back at Hawkins Middle School since they fought the Demogorgon. Will is still at home, recovering from his time in the Upside Down; he probably will be for another week or two.

Mr. Clarke's classroom doesn't even look different. It's eerily put back together, like nothing otherworldly occurred there at all. Dustin assumes the "bad men" have something to do with that.

But being back in the very same classroom where Eleven bravely saved them from the monster and then disappeared to God knows

where – well – it's not sitting too well with Dustin. He wants the hell *out* of there.

Life has just continued to go on all around them and Dustin *hates* it. Nobody knows where Will had *really* been, what he had endured. Nobody knows what happened in this classroom, but himself, Lucas, and Mike.

Nobody *knows*.

It's not right.

Nobody knows that they saved the world.

*Eleven* saved the world.

Dustin rubs his eyes, tries to focus on what Mr. Clarke is saying.

Ecosystems.

He can't help but wonder which types of ecosystems are most like the Upside Down. From what Will has disclosed, it's very cold and dark, and thick with vines and roots and forests. So maybe it's like a tundra-slash-mangrove.

Fuck.

He can't even sit through a simple lecture without the Upside Down creeping into his mind. Can't get the "monsters are real, other dimensions are real, evil is truly out there" concept out of his head.

But that's not the only thing weighing him down.

Dustin steals a glance at Mike who is sitting on the opposite side of Lucas. The kid can't even bring himself to look up. One elbow is propped on his desk while his hand is cradling his forehead. The other arm is wrapped tightly around his stomach.

Lucas, on the other hand, is sitting in the desk beside him and seems content with doodling on the cover of his notebook. (He's drawing the Demogorgon.)

Dustin sees Mike shift uncomfortably in his seat and wonders if he's feeling ill. He can't imagine the kind of turmoil he must be in. Dustin wishes he could usher Mike out of the room and just hug the shit out of him.

He watches Mike closely for the rest of Mr. Clarke's lecture. He doesn't look up once, and Dustin *swears* he sees a couple of teardrops slip between his fingertips and onto his desk.

Finally, *finally*, the bell rings and Mike grabs his books and heads for the door so fast that Dustin doesn't even have time to blink.

"You think he's okay?" Lucas asks lowly as he gathers his things.

Dustin shakes his head. "Not a chance. We need to find him."

xxx

They do find him.

He's at his locker, as one typically is between classes.

"Mike."

They surround him, one on either side. Mike's head is deep into his locker, posture worn. Lucas puts a hand on his shoulder asking, "Hey, are you alright?"

Mike closes his locker then and turns so that his face is exposed; his eyes are puffy and red but he's keeping himself from actively crying in front of the students walking by. He shakes his head. "This is harder than I thought."

"We know," Lucas says softly.

"I want to go home," Mike confesses with a croak, leaning the back of his head against his closed locker, a textbook clutched to his chest. "I don't feel good."

Dustin bites down on his lip, heart aching for his friend. "We know that too. Look, maybe you should go to the nurse, man."

He doesn't expect Mike to agree, but he does. "Yeah, maybe," he admits, lifting a single shoulder up in a shrug. "But Will..."

Lucas sighs audibly. Of course Mike would be thinking about Will. They're all supposed to go over to the Byers' place after school and Mike knows that his mom would never let him go along if he's sent home sick.

They haven't seen Will since they visited him in the hospital five days ago. Joyce had asked them to give him some time.

"Don't worry about Will," Lucas says. "Me an' Dustin will still go over there once school lets out. He'll understand."

"Yeah," Dustin echoes.

Mike isn't convinced. "I don't know..." he says uncertainly.

"He *will*," Dustin emphasizes. "It's Will."

Mike hesitates a little more. His eyes are sunken, face pale, and Dustin wonders if he's slept at all in the past week.

The warning bell for next period sounds, and so Dustin gives it his best last-ditch effort. "Mike, seriously. You look like a gust of wind could knock you over. Please. Just... please." *Take care of yourself. For once in your life, put yourself first. Please.*

"Okay," Mike gives in, looking down at the floor. "I'll go to the nurse."

Dustin and Lucas meet eyes. "I'll walk with him," he tells Lucas. "You go on to class. Let Ms. Andrews know where we are."

"Sure," Lucas nods. "Feel better, Mike, okay? Radio me tonight."

"I will," Mike says. "Bye, Lucas."

Dustin slings an arm around Mike's shoulder and, together, they head in the direction of the nurse.

xxx

En route, the boys come across one unsavory character with a casted arm.

"Hey, Wheeler!"

Both Dustin and Mike stop in their tracks and reluctantly turn to face the speaker.

"Where's your psycho girlfriend?" Troy sneers at Mike. "Out buying a wig?"

Dustin instinctively steps in front of Mike, shielding him from Troy's presence. "Shut the hell up, Troy, you wanker. Don't you have to get back to sucking dirty donkey balls?"

An immature, junior high insult at best, but Dustin knew it would get under Troy's skin.

"Fuck you, freak. I was talking to Wheeler."

Dustin opens his mouth to retort with another smartass remark, but before he can, a teacher starts scolding the remaining students in the hallway.

"There are bells for a reason, people," she asserts. "They mean get to class! Troy, don't be late again, mister, or I'll be calling your mother!"

Troy flips Dustin the bird with his good hand and then slinks into his classroom.

"C'mon, man, just ignore him," Dustin says, turning his attention back on Mike. His friend's eyes are closed, face paled even further. "Hey," he implores, gripping his shoulder tightly. "Mike...?"

Mike makes a strangled noise in the back of his throat. "I don't feel good," he breathes. "I need..."

"Bathroom?" Dustin guesses, because he sounds like he's trying his damndest to speak over the urge to gag.

Mike barely has the strength to nod.

"Okay, man. This way." Dustin nudges him toward the bathroom near the cafeteria at the end of the hall, praying they make it in time.

They do, but only just.

xxx

The sinks were the closest, so that's where Mike plants his feet to bring up the very little he had eaten for breakfast.

Thankfully, the restrooms by the cafeteria are deserted this time of day since lunch period isn't for another two hours. Mike doesn't need anybody walking in on him right now.

Dustin hovers by the door, wanting to give his friend some space. When he spits a final time and pushes himself away from the sink, Dustin stumbles over his own feet in his haste to gather some paper towels and shove them into Mike's hands, trying to be helpful.

"Thanks," Mike mumbles, voice hoarse and embarrassed. He wipes his mouth and tosses the crumpled towels into the receptacle.

"You okay?" Dustin asks dumbly, and then decides on a better question. "You need to sit down for a minute?"

Mike nods, so Dustin guides him to the wall opposite the sinks and eases him down gently, then joins him on the tile floor.

xxx

"What about you?" Mike asks suddenly. "Are you okay?"

Dustin turns his head toward the ironic speaker of the question. They'd been sitting in silence for the better part of three minutes, letting him catch his breath.

"Me?" Dustin asks. "Are you seriously asking *me* that?"

"Silence isn't working," Mike explains, eyes closed and swallowing hard.

It's clear to Dustin that he's still feeling keyed up. "What can I do?" he

asks.

Mike opens his eyes. "Just... talk to me," he says, voice raw. "How are you doing with all of this?"

Dustin licks his lips. He doesn't really know what to say. He settles with, "A little better than you, I guess," and Mike snorts softly in amusement, as if to say *no kidding*.

"But uh—" Dustin continues. "I'm not doing too good, man. At all." He takes off his ball cap and starts fiddling with it.

"What's the worst part?" Mike asks.

Dustin shrugs. "The nightmares." He answers tentatively, because he knows what the follow-up question will be.

"About the Demogorgon?"

Dustin feels his heart in his chest. He's needed to confront Mike about this for a while; he's just not sure if now is the right time. He swallows hard. "Some of them," he says softly. "But mostly they're about something else."

Mike's eyebrows knit together, genuine concern in his eyes. "What are they about?"

"You."

"Me?"

Dustin nods. "About what happened at—" his voice breaks. "At the quarry."

Mike sits stunned beside him. Silent. He holds his head with his hand; leaves it there.

"Look, you don't have to say anything," Dustin rushes to say. "We don't have to talk about it now. I just... God, Mike. I'm worried about you. *Really* worried."

"I'm not going to jump off a cliff again, if that's what you mean," Mike



tells him, defensive.

The bluntness surprises Dustin. Knocks the air out of him. "I know that."

*Does he?*

He bites down on his lip. "I-I think I'm just hung up on the fact that you did. And the *what if*? You know? *What if* she hadn't saved you?"

Mike leans the back of his head against the wall. "But she did save me," he rasps, voice echoing around the empty room. "She saved me – us – so many times. And now she's—"

He breaks off with a shuddering breath.

"Lost," Dustin finishes for him softly. He doesn't let him say *gone*. He won't do that. They don't know that for sure. "She's just lost, Mike."

Mike makes a funny noise in the back of his throat and starts crying again, silent tears trailing tracks down his cheeks, and Dustin can't stand it.

"Shit, Mike," he breathes and reaches for him. "Just... shit. Jesus. C'mere."

Mike does. He leans toward Dustin and falls into an embrace. Dustin hugs him tightly and Mike hugs him back, and it feels so good because Mike is *alive* and *feeling* and *here*. They stay like that for a while, Mike's face burrowed in the crevice between Dustin's neck and shoulder.

When Mike's snuffles die down and he becomes the semblance of calm, he pulls away. Dustin keeps a hand on his shoulder, at an arm's reach. "You good?"

Mike laughs – actually laughs – maniacally and dry. "Would you believe me if I said I was?"

Dustin grins stupidly at him. "No, I guess not." He puts his cap back on and then pushes himself up off the floor. He realizes that he's going to be in a world of trouble if he doesn't get Mike to the nurse

and himself back to class soon. He holds a hand out to Mike and helps pull him to his feet.

Mike pauses and sucks in a deep breath once he's vertical. "You know, this is stupid, but when Will went missing, the one thought I had... the only thing I wanted was to get him back," he says softly. "I thought, if we can just get Will back, everything will be okay." He brushes a tear away from his cheek. "But..." he motions around.

*Everything isn't okay. I'm not okay.*

"It's the arrival fallacy," Dustin discloses quietly. "The belief that when you arrive at a certain destination, you will finally be happy." He shuffles his feet. "It's not stupid, Mike. To want to get your friend back."

"I guess I just didn't consider what we might lose on the way."

"None of us did," Dustin says. "None of us could have known. All I know is, you're a hero, Mike. Will wouldn't be back if it wasn't for you."

Mike shakes his head. "I don't feel like a hero."

"That's how you know you are one," Dustin tells him. A profound silence follows and he relaxes a little when he sees a glimmer of acceptance of his praise in Mike's eyes.

"Now, c'mon." He pulls Mike by the arm and nudges him toward the exit. "I need to get you to the nurse before I get written up for ditching class."

Mike snorts softly and wipes his eyes one final time. "You've fought a *Demogorgon* and you're worried about getting *written up*?"

Dustin grins and with a shrug, he says, "Eh, po-tay-to, po-tah-to."

Mike rolls his eyes at his antics in the purest Mike Wheeler way possible.

And Dustin thinks they might just get back to okay.

**Fin.**